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ABSTRACT

Project PALS (Parenting and Literacy Skills) was designed as a model of holistic comprehensive family literacy for those families connected with a Head Start program. Forty-three of an anticipated 75 families were served. Adult students who were referred by Head Start personnel participated in classes in English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, and General Educational Development (GED) at two sites. Literacy Volunteers of America and VISTA volunteers were assigned to work with PALS. Parent education sessions were conducted in both English and Spanish. Home visits allowed for individualization of the program. Each site had regularly scheduled family field trips. The Parent and Child Time on Friday mornings provided parents and children with experiences in shared reading, language stimulation activities, and interactions with various educational materials. Twenty participants either took and passed the GED, passed part of the GED, or were awaiting their GED test date. Children were pre- and posttested with the PreSchool Inventory and improved from an average pretest score of 11.7% to an average posttest score of 53.2%. Parents moved from watching their children to becoming active partners in the interaction sessions. An evaluation concluded that staff willingness to review and adjust the program and emphasis on participant involvement were the strengths of the program. The project was successful because it positively affected many families' lives. (YLB)

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ED 373 151

Project PALS (Parenting and Literacy Skills)
Final Report

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March 1, 1994

Franmarie Kennedy Keel
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Washington, D.C. 20202-7560

Dear Ms. Kennedy Keel:

Enclosed please find our final report for Project PALS. This project had some problems along the way, most significantly the inability to open the third site. This reduced the number of families we could serve. However, the families which were served showed the growth expected and enjoyed the program. The greatest problem was the short length of the project. Just as we were showing real progress and having more families enrolling, the project year ended. I strongly urge you to consider multi-year funding.

Sincerely,

Marcia Murray, Ph.D.
Bilingual/ESOL Supervisor

Enc.

Introduction

Project PALS (Parenting and Literacy Skills) was originally designed as a model of holistic comprehensive family literacy for those families connected with a Headstart program. Comprehensive family literacy was to include adult basic literacy, child development, parenting, and supervised parent/child interaction. The program did not run perfectly. There were problems along the way. The most serious was that of target population. Instead of serving the 75 families anticipated during the grant proposal, we were only able to serve a total of 43 families. However, of these families, 20 have either taken and passed the GED ...ssed part of the GED, and/or are awaiting their GED test date. The children were pre- and post-tested with the PreSchool Inventory and improved from an average pretest of 11.7% to an average post-test score of 53.2%. The parents moved from sitting i the corner watching their children interact with the program staff to becoming active partners in the interaction sessions. The parents and children went on field trips and took an active role in pot-luck meals. The family portfolios kept show artwork, projects and parent interviews where the parents showed their enjoyment and appreciation for the program and the process of learning with their children.

Adult Education

After a slow start, the families began to register for the program. Although child care and transportation were available, the parents had a very difficult time in attending adult education classes since they were held at a location other than the Headstart centers. Program staff spent the beginning months trying to work with the parents in time management, scheduling, and coordinating their arrangements for class attendance. Finally, it was decided to alter the program format and offer adult education as part of the parent sessions held on Tuesday evenings. This worked very well and the parents participated in English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and GED.

In Bryan, the parents had the choice of attending adult education at three sites. They could attend ESL classes at the Region VI ESL center, which offers free classes during weekday mornings and several evening; they could attend ABE/GED classes at the Bryan Independent School District Adult Learning Center with classes 8:00 - 12:00 Monday - Friday and 6:00 - 9:00 on Tuesday and Thursday evenings; and they finally had the same classes offered on the Tuesday evenings when they met for their parent education sessions. The session times were extended to include both components at one site. This addition of the on-site adult education has proven to be a success and a key to the continuity of the project. Families do not want to travel from one site to another. "One stop shopping" seems to be their preference.

The same started at the Brenham site on May 5, 1993. Again, the parents had the options of attending the ABE/GED and ESL classes offered through the Brenham Adult Learning Center or at the Wednesday evening parent education sessions. These sessions were also extended in order to allow for the additional time required for both components. This simple change made an enormous difference in participation and, ultimately adult success. Formative evaluation, participant needs assessment, and altering the program to address these needs is a vital component for the success of any program.

Literacy Volunteers of America-Brazos Valley appointed trained LVA tutors to work with designed adult students in the Project PALS program. The tutors had been trained using the approved LVA eighteen hour training program as mandated by the national LVA office. This training consists of the whole language approach, phonics, word attack skills, context clues, and other related educational methodologies. Upon completion of the training course the tutors were assigned students for one on one tutorials.

Students were referred for the program through appropriate Head Start personnel. At that point, LVA requires use of its own unique enrollment and assessment procedures. Upon completion of the intake interview, the READ test is administered. This test determines the level of reading, sight word ability, listening, and phonics background.

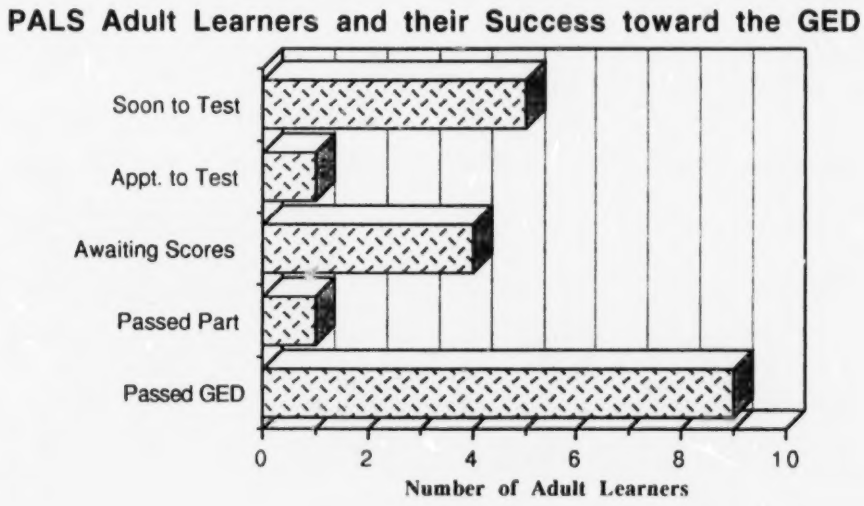
Tutors and students are paired based upon similar traits and interests for a successful match. The tutor then meets with the LVA administrator to review the student's test, goals, and program.

The student/tutor pairs meet twice weekly, an hour each time at a public place. Each matched pair determine their own meeting place and designated time slot best suiting their needs. The tutor is contacted monthly by the LVA-BV office for evaluation of the student's progress, total hours of tutoring, and total hours of preparation during that time period. This is the normal course for LVA tutors.

For the PALS project, a VISTA Volunteer assigned to the LVA-BV was to work with PALS, including visiting the program at all three site locations and being in close contact with the appropriate Head Start personnel for referrals and feedback. An estimate of twenty families were considered appropriate as candidates for this portion of the Project PALS. Six had been referred and placed with LVA tutors. There were serious problems with the LVA component of PALS. During the course of the project, LVA staff would arrange testing dates with the PALS participants who were being considered for tutors. This proved to be too much "test anxiety" for our clients. After all, they had already pre-tested with us and were constantly working on some type of "assignment." Unfortunately, the LVA organization requires use of their own assessment testing, regardless of what other testing has been done. When our clients did show up for the testing, the LVA representative was not always there. There was a lot of this missed appointments and became a strong deterrent to our participants working with LVA. A total of six adults were served by LVA.

English as a Second Language was offered for those parents who needed it. Five of the parents who began English as a Second Language (ESL) with us in the PALS project have continued with us by signing up for another family literacy project BISD began immediately after PALS ended.

Of the 43 adults, 9 passed the GED, 1 passed 4 of the 5 GED section tests, 4 are awaiting their scores, and 1 has a test date. An additional 5 parents are not yet ready for the GED but have made such great progress that they will be very shortly (see following chart).



Eight parents were in the ESL component of the adult education component. Of those eight, five have continued to study through another family literacy program within the BISD.

Child Development

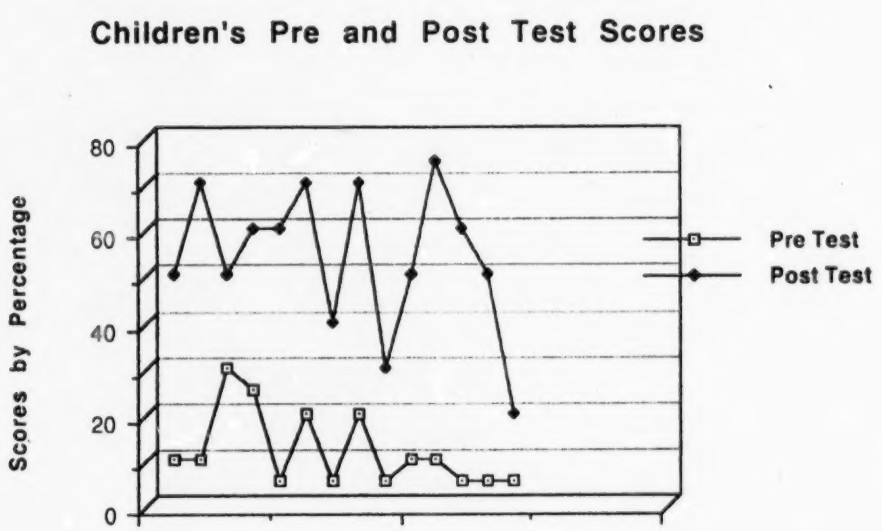
The emphasis on emergent literacy has increased within the Head Start program since the beginning of the Family Literacy program; the Head Start program has collected several training videos and manuals and has incorporated them into their in-service training program for all staff. The Head Start staff involved with Family Literacy on Tuesdays and Friday mornings implemented Family Literacy efforts into their lesson plans and activities

for the rest of the Centers and Home Base areas the program serves. Many children have benefited from the combined effort, in addition to the children actually enrolled.

The children in the Family Literacy program exhibited some very positive behaviors about books; parents requested more and more books to be sent into the homes every week. In the Bryan site alone, over 250 books were given to the children throughout the term of the program. These books could be seen proudly stored or displayed in the homes on home visits. For the majority of the families, these books were the only books in the home. We told every family that this was the beginning of their home library.

The children also received toothbrushes (along with enough for their parents or siblings), school and art supplies. The children received the latter in reusable school boxes. Many of them began to identify "school tools" and the idea of "going to school."

The children were pre-tested and post-tested with the PreSchool Inventory. The lowest score on the pre-test was a 5% and the highest was a 30%. The lowest score on the post-test was 20% and the highest was 75%. All the children showed growth (see following chart).



Parent Education

Parenting Sessions: Instruction to the parents regarding emerging literacy skills and developmentally appropriate practices to promote those skills took place in the evening sessions. The parents also worked with the Parent Educators on parenting skills through the Practical Parent Education (PPE) curriculum. Topics which seemed to be of greatest interest to the parents include discipline, helping with homework, family communication and sibling associations. All topics lent themselves to discussion and the parents were not shy about active participation. The Parent Educators also served as advocates and liaisons with the parents and community social service agencies. This relates directly to the parenting sessions since life skills have become a component of the curriculum.

The parenting sessions were held in both English and Spanish. At each of the sites, the Parent Educator or an aide was bilingual. The PPE curriculum, developed in Plano, Texas is disseminated by the Texas Association of School Boards and is produced in both English and Spanish. The curriculum is modularly designed with each module addressing a specific topic such as self esteem in children, self esteem in parents, family communication, and conflict resolution. Each module has a teacher's lesson plan, handouts, a parent send home sheet, and enrichment activities. The parent educators were trained to use the curriculum in an open dialogue method, allowing for discussion and group forums.

Sometimes these open forums caused the parent educators to put aside the prepared lesson to deal with a topic brought up by the parents. At risk families often have immediate needs such as health, housing, or public assistance problems. At one site visit, the project coordinator walked in on a parenting lesson only to find the parents filling out applications for utilities assistance. The assistance fund had just become available and there was a very narrow window of time to apply for the funds. They brought the forms to the PALS meeting and asked for assistance. This became a lesson in how to complete an application

with accuracy and how to deal with governmental agencies. On other occasions, the meetings turned into counseling groups, decision -making lessons, or referral points. These are the life skills vital to the daily existence of our program participants.

Home Visits: The PALS staff made home visits to the families throughout the project year. These visits allowed for individualization of the program. In Brenham especially, these home visits served to alleviate a racially motivated problem. Due to a lack of communication, the Hispanic and African-American families became involved in a minor dispute which rapidly grew out of proportion. All the families threatened to quit the program. The staff visited all the families individually to allow them to vent and discuss their concerns and opinions in confidence and the security of their homes. The situation was resolved and only a very few families dropped out of the program. The situation was used as the rationale for a series of multicultural classes. The adults discussed cultural differences, ate different ethnic foods, and shared their own culture with each other. This proved to be one of the most successful and certainly the most enjoyable of all the meetings for the families. Coincidentally, the project director was getting married in a Jewish synagogue duri: g the multicultural period and the participants decided to attend in order to add another ethnic experience to their repertoire!

The Bryan group did not have the same problems with cultural clashes and gelled as a group almost immediately. The home visits in Bryan were used primarily to keep in touch with the families who missed sessions. The home visits were a very important part of the project since it was this personal touch which made the difference for many of the parents. They felt more comfortable in the program because of the informality and non-threatening atmosphere developed by working with someone who was a visitor in their homes.

Field Trips: Each site had regularly scheduled family field trips. It was a program rule that at least one parent had to go on the field trips in order for the children to go. At first, many of the parents were hesitant to go on a field trip. They preferred to stay home

and let the staff "babysit" their children. Even after they understood that they were required to attend, the parents would isolate themselves from the children and staff, sitting under a tree or in another part of the room, visiting and chatting. It took a lot of patience and discussion on the part of the staff to bring the parents into the process. Once they learned to relax and be a part of the activities, the parents discovered that they actually enjoyed doing things and going places with their children. This was one of the greatest revelations of the project. Each site held nine field trips. The trips included walks in the local community, picnics in the park, visits to the grocery store plant, Splashdown water park, the Texas A&M University Children's Barn Yard, the fire house, and the local museum.

Parent/Child Interaction

The Parent and Child Time on Friday mornings at the Head Start Center, where shared reading times, language stimulation activities and interactions with a variety of educational materials have provided parents and children the experience of time together in a print rich environment. Meal time on Friday mornings provided a rich environment for discussion and language stimulation between parents and child(ren). This was the most difficult time for the parents. As with the field trips, the parents did not want to interact or "play" with their children. They wanted the staff to watch the children while they visited or --as one parent suggested -- went shopping and to run errands. The staff used the early weeks to role model and show the parents the importance and enjoyment of quality time spent with their children. Many of the parents had to learn to communicate with their children. Their automatic reaction with the children was one-way talking. The parent would order, yell, or chastise. There was very little two-way communication until the parents had been in the program for at least several months.

This was a very frustrating time for the staff. The staff development had to address this issue. Some of the staff were quick to blame or condemn the parents for their lack of family communication. But with the staff training and staff dialoguing, they soon came to

realize that the parents did not communicate because they had never learned how. These parents were handling their children as they had been handled. As the parents began to enjoy the interaction with their children, the staff began to enjoy the interaction as well. This was a real accomplishment for both the parents and the staff.

The true test came at the end of program banquet. All the families and staff came together in a large hall for dinner, speakers, and awards. At the first participant gathering, the parents sat, seemingly unaware while their children ran screaming out of control around the facilities. The only time there was any order was when a staff member intervened.

At the banquet, the children sat with the parents. They did move around the room but did so quietly. They mingled and visited with their siblings and friends from the program. There were no chaotic scenarios. When the families had to line up for dinner, the staff stood back and watched with a mixture of pride and amazement while the parents stood with the children waiting patiently for their turn in the serving line. The children stayed fairly close to their parents, conversing and laughing in subdued voices. When the parents corrected their children, it was also in patient, subdued voices. The parents explained the delays or conversed with the children about the evening program, the food they were about to eat, or pointed out their friends as they went by. These families had grown in the course of a very short year.

Training for Staff

Staff attended staff development sessions on Friday afternoons. One session each month was devoted entirely to family literacy. The family literacy staff development training sessions covered a general overview of family literacy, an overview of the PALS program, the CASAS and PreSchool Inventory, and a training on the Practical Parent Education curriculum. In the family literacy session, Dr. Don F. Seaman, professor of adult education and literacy at Texas A&M University spoke to the staff about the history and research in the field of family literacy. He introduced them to the various programs

and models in use, explaining strengths and weaknesses of each. He discussed his involvement and research at the National Center on Family Literacy, specifically follow-up evaluation on the Kenan model. During the PALS overview session, Dr. Marcia (de Avila) Murray, PALS Project Coordinator walked the staff through the program proposal, goals and objectives, and program design. She spoke about the holistic approach to family literacy and how it would be applicable to the target population. She explained the various staff roles and possible responses of the family members. She touched on the recruitment and retention aspect of the design.

Dr. Murray and Ydalia Rosas, PALS Educational Coordinator, held an evening training session covering the Practical Parent Education curriculum. They walked the staff through the workbook and exercises, including a hands-on activity. The Spanish adaptation was discussed and the handouts were studied. Dr. Seaman also conducted a training session on the CASAS and Pre School Inventory instruments. He spent the afternoon teaching the staff how to administer the tests. They worked through the instruments and practiced taking and giving the tests.

Another training session covered the Literacy Volunteers of America and how their agency worked with adult non-readers. The LVA representative discussed the LVA history, philosophy, and tutor training process. She explained how LVA and PALS would work together.

Other staff development sessions were held with the entire Headstart staff, covering topics specific to developmental child care and working with families on home visits.

Support Services

Support services included transportation and GED test payments. The program paid $30.00 for the test and $10.00 for the state of Texas issued certificate. For many people, the test fee is often enough of a barrier to prevent their taking the test. While

$40.00 may not seem like a great amount of money to many of us, some people must decide whether to pay for the test or pay for utilities, medicine, or shoes for their children.

Transportation has always been a difficult barrier for the families with whom we work. Therefore, it was decided that a service available to the participating families would be transportation to the evening and Friday morning sessions. This has proven to be a great plus. In Bryan, the transportation was provided by utilizing a Bryan Independent School District bus. The bus stopped by at each family home and returned the families to their door at the end of the session. This door-to-door service allowed the participants to spend their travel time informally socializing with each other and helped to build the network of friendship. During the day in Bryan, those parents who had chosen to attend the ESL center or the BISD Adult Learning Center, but had no private transportation, were issued Brazos Transit trolley passes. These passes are good for unlimited use for one month and were renewed on a monthly basis upon request. The Brazos Transit system gave our participants these passes, valued at $35.00 each, at no charge to either the participants or the program.

In Brenham, the staff used the Headstart vans to transport the families to the center. The vans were driven by the PALS staff who stayed to facilitate the sessions. Sometimes, the staff and/or participants carpooled. This was an even more informal method of socializing and breaking the ice before the meetings. It also allowed for continued discussion of the evening topic after the meetings ended.

Conclusion

As in many new programs, there had been some unanticipated problems which our formative evaluation have highlighted. One problem, already addressed above, is that of no participation at the Hearne Headstart Center. The staff looked at other approaches but to no avail. The Hearne site never opened.

A second problem was that of low participation numbers. The projected population was set at 75 families. Forty-three actually participated in PALS. The low numbers are a result of 1) the problem at the Hearne site, 2) hesitation on the part of the parents to enter anything new and unfamiliar, and 3) the fact that the participant population was limited to Headstart families. We constantly had families requesting program entrance but they did not meet qualifying criteria since they had no children being served by Headstart. It is suggested here that the Headstart organization could have taken a stronger stand on recruiting families but that would have had to have taken place at a higher personnel level. The staff who worked on the project did everything they could to recruit new families.

Previous family literacy programs operated by the Bryan Independent School District have shown us that the best recruitment technique for this type of program is that of word-of-mouth. Since word-of-mouth is also the slowest method, we have learned patience. It takes our target population a longer time than for others to gain trust in the program and make the commitment to attend regularly.

The families who participated in Project PALS were very active and showed great progress in this short period of time. This program and its high rate of success is indicative of the even greater success which a longer grant period would allow. It is strongly suggested that this type of project is funded for a minimal term of 36 months. Luckily, the BISD was able to utilize other funds to continue this project in a very similar format. BISD is currently offering a family literacy program in the public housing projects in Bryan. Many of the PALS families who desired continued program services enrolled in the new program. That program is currently serving 36 families.

Evaluation Report of Project PALS: A Holistic Approach to Family Literacy in Headstart Child Development Settings in Texas

Submitted by:

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December, 1993

Evaluation of Project PALS - A Holistic Approach to Family Literacy in Headstart Child Development Settings in Texas

Introduction

The recent emphasis on the "Illiteracy - Literacy" problem in the U.S. has fostered the development of some different approaches toward trying to reduce the incidence of illiteracy. This is the result of funding agencies, both public and private, requiring some kind of accountability for expenditures of their moneys in programs designed to increase the literacy abilities of some segment(s) of the population. This project was one of those in which different approaches were used than are usually found in typical adult literacy programs which have existed since 1965.

Family Literacy

One of the more recent programs to emerge in this continuous struggle to reduce illiteracy has been something called "Family Literacy".

With some exceptions, the two-traditional educational response to the problem has been a two-track system in both private and public sector programs - a remediation track for the adult in the form of adult literacy education, or more recently, workplace literacy programs; and a prevention track for the child through early efforts, such as the Headstart program.

Family literacy programs aooroach the problem somewhat differently. Although there is no single definition or single "family literacy" model, these programs operate on the stated or implicit belief that it is important for the parent or primary caregiver to place a high value on the acquisition of literacy skills and to take a role in the child's education in order for the child to do his or her best in school. Further, the more literate the parent or caregiver

becomes, the more effective he or she will be in performing the necessary at-home and school-related tasks that support the child's educational development. (First Teachers: Barbara Bush Foundation, 1989)

The emphasis is upon the "family" with parents and children learning together in hope that both will realize the value of education not only in their individual lives, but also in the family as a collective. Therefore, family literacy is perceived as a means of creating an awareness of important concepts and principles which enable the family members to acquire skills to improve their "living" as well as their "learning" activities for the remainder of their lives.

Study Procedures

The model used for evaluating this project is that advocated by Sara Steele in the 1990 Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education. The model consists of four components:

Proof of effect: What evidence exists that the program has had any effect on the lives of the participants?

Judgment against criteria: How well has the program met the stated objectives?

Critical Questions: What questions, unique to this program, are important to the major stakeholders?

Valuing: Who values the program? What evidence exists to support such claims?

Data were primarily obtained through interviews with parents and staff, observations of various program functions, i.e., classes, assessment procedures, etc., and reviewing selected program records. Data have been reported within the four components in the model.

Proof of Effect

Interviews with parents and program staff indicated that Project PALS has affected the lives of family members in various ways.

Children

At the beginning of the program, it was quite obvious that most of the children had never played (nor possibly seen) "structured" toys, i.e., building blocks, etc. However, as they began to learn how to use them, not only were they unwilling to leave them as the class time ended, they began to show some creativity in the figures they constructed. As some parents indicated, "The children can actually build things without being told how to do it. They could never do that before".

Some parents and staff indicated that one of the biggest changes in some of the children was their learning to interact and socialize with children of other ethnic backgrounds as they participated in the program. Apparently. some children had never had that opportunity before and were hesitant at first, but when the program ended, differences in ethnicity were not even noticed as all of they children learned and played together.

Children learned basic hygiene behaviors from staff and eventually from parents throughout the program. These behaviors had to be emphasized to both parent and child in some families, but the children, in general, seemed to acquire these behaviors more readily, and in some cases (washing hands before eating), usually reminded the parents more often than vice-versa.

At one site, they children learned to plant a garden and watch the vegetables grow. They learned the names of the vegetables and could tell their parents why the vegetables were good for them. The children indicated they had never before known about vegetables.

Parents

A number of parents indicated that they now spend time reading to their children whereas, before participating in the PALS program, they did not do so. This change was attributed to several things, but those deemed most important were: (a) constant encouragement

from staff and opportunities to practice, (b) availability of books to take home and use, and (c) increasing their abilities to read as the project progressed. In some cases, they also read to other children in the family who did not participate in this family literacy program. They believed that homework assignments also had resulted in their family studying together.

At one site, parents learned to cook and eat new foods which in general, were low in cost and nutritious. Each Friday, the cook would buy and prepare the food, but before serving it, would explain what to buy, how to prepare it, and how it was nutritious for the family. Parents also learned the concept of the "thank you" bite. Every person had to try at least one bite as a "thank you" for the hard work of the cook in preparing it. This evaluator witnessed both parents and children who originally had decided not to eat a new food, but after the "thank you" bite, decided they really liked it and continued to finish their meal. Parents indicated that they had tried some of the new foods at home and that their families learned to like them.

At one site, some parents and children had begun to learn English. It was their first attempt to do so and they indicated that all family members were beginning to use English a little more at home. This was very important to them and they had begun to believe they could really improve their lives by learning to use English.

One lesson observed by the evaluator concentrated on communicable diseases and how to avoid them. In questioning the parents after the lesson, the evaluator learned that this was the first time some of them had heard this information. They were able to indicate some behaviors which would lessen their chances of becoming ill and also indicated they would begin instilling the importance of those behaviors in the other family members.

Evidence Against Criteria

Each of the program goals is stated and the attainment (or non-attainment is discussed accordingly.

<u>Goal 1 - To extend the existing services offered by local adult basic education and literacy programs, and to assist adult participants in</u>

raising their educational level. One-third of the adult learners will show an improvement of at least two academic (grade) levels, as shown by pre- and post-testing. One third of all parents served at the Bryan site either had passed the GED test and others were preparing to take the test within a few weeks toward the end of the project. In addition, one parent at the Brenham site had registered to take the test and others were considering taking the test within a few weeks. This, coupled with the fact that other parents had improved their academic skills leaves no doubt that this goal had been achieved. These data do not include the fact that some parents, particularly at the Bryan site, also improved their English-speaking skills. Although no test data were available, staff indicated that several were much more proficient in English near the end of the program.

Goal 2 - To assist families in modeling functions of literacy and parenting strategies in child growth and development and educational processes for children. Ninety percent of the adult learners will show understanding and utilization of positive modeling and parenting strategies. This goal was measured through interviews with both staff and parents. At the Bryan site, staff indicated that all parents who had participated to any extent had, indeed, acquired new, positive parenting skills. This information came through self-reporting by parents of their conduct in the home prior to the PALS program. That, followed by observation during the project activities, plus self-reporting by the same parents after participation, indicated that changes had occurred. These included both new behaviors learned during the PALS program, but also changes in some behaviors which were now more positive in nature. This same information was not reported nearly so strongly at the Brenham site. In responding to the questions from the evaluation team, parents felt they were parenting much better, but could not always be specific in identifying behaviors which had been changed or acquired. Although it could not be documented that 90% of the parents modeled positive parenting strategies all of the time, the evaluator felt that most of them modeled positive strategies at least some of the time because they could identify many of the desired behaviors when asked to do so.

Goal 3 - To establish positive parent modeling and beneficial attitudes towards literacy with participating children in the program. Sixty percent will demonstrate improvements, as determined by their teachers, in their classroom or pre-school settings. Sixty percent

of the preschoolers will be on-level, as determined by the Preschool Inventory or as referred to the appropriate agencies for assistance. Teachers at both the Bryan and Brenham sites indicated that almost all of the participating children had acquired various kinds of positive behaviors during the program. These included, but were not limited to reduced aggressive behavior (stopped cursing, biting hitting and throwing things at other children); improved social skills, particularly with children of different ethnic backgrounds; and improved hygiene habits. Therefore, that part of the goal was reached. In regard to the second part, the pre-and-post-test data were not available to the evaluator(s) at the time this report was submitted. However, oral input from staff indicated that many of the children had, indeed, made some gains their academic learning.

Critical Questions

Most of the critical questions related to Project PALS relate to factors which would enable the program to improve. These questions were provided by both parents who participated in the program and by program staff.

1. How can project staff compensate for unanticipated external factors which interfere with their reaching their objectives? In the proposal, three sites were proposed for project activities. These had been proposed as a result of cooperative planning with other literacy programs in the area. However, one site became unavailable because of an incident in the community which caused most of the citizens to become afraid to venture out during the times the program would be offered. Therefore, although the project was well planned, based upon needs and probable participation of the local families, the site did not function as an integral part of the project. This, in turn, affected the ability of the project staff to reach their proposed goals.

Another impeding external factor was expressed by some Hispanic mothers who indicated that their spouses did not want them to participate, so they stopped coming to the classes. Again, no amount of encouragement from the staff nor offers to speak to the spouses was sufficient to keep them in the program.

2. How can transportation needs of the families be met with limited funding? At one site, most families lived several miles from the

program location. Although the families could ride the school buses, the family literacy program met for only a half-day. Therefore, parents had to furnish their transportation home at noon and many could not do so. Therefore, some families who wanted to participate in the program could not because of lack of transportation.

3. What can be done to alleviate the fears of assessment and evaluation by the participating parents? Each time assessment was planned, many of the parents at one site did not come to class. Although many excuses were given, they always returned after the assessment time had passed. Teachers and other staff explained that the confidentiality of each student's performance would be maintained. The importance of assessment to both the individual and the program were emphasized, but to no avail. In this writer's opinion, the staff did all they could do in this matter.

4. What can be done when one partner does not fulfill it's obligations? In Project PALS, one agency was to provide tutoring for parents when needed. More than one staff indicated that not until near the end of the program did such tutoring occur, this despite many requests for this service by the project staff. This service was particularly needed for some of the non-English-speaking parents. However, it is possible tutors for these students were simply not available, but if so, the staff was not informed.

5. How can ample "start-up" time be provided so the project can succeed? This question is being asked by the staff of many literacy projects, especially those which are funded for 18 or fewer m months. Time is needed for sufficient marketing to the target audience(s), for initiating an active recruiting plan, and for assembling competent staff who are willing, in some cases, to leave a more secure position because of their interest in family literacy. One suggestion is provided under "Recommendations".

6. What kinds of adjustments were made to improve the program? The most important adjustment was to add GED classes after the project had been functioning for a few months. This stimulated more parents to enroll. In fact, at one site, not all who wanted to enroll could do so, even though the other site (38 miles away) could have enrolled more families.

Valuing

Who values the PALS program? Many people, according to information acquired from several interviews.

The Headstart Program Staff. In many communities, family literacy programs seem to compete instead of cooperating, especially Headstart and Even Start programs. However, cooperation between Headstart and Project PALS occurred in many ways. Not only did Headstart share facilities, but the individual who prepared the meals for the program in Brenham (a paid employee) from Monday through Thursday, became a volunteer for the PALS program on Fridays where she cooked the noon meal and conducted a nutrition lesson with the parents. When asked why she volunteered do this on her "day off", she simply replied, "Because this program is valuable and needed by these families".

The Participating Families. Near the end of the program when the evaluation team was conducting the final round of interviews, all of the parents were concerned that the program would end in a few weeks. They expressed their great appreciation for the program, how it had benefited their lives and their families. They not only improved their academic skills, but they learned much about their communities from the various field trips which were a regular part of the program.

The PALS Program Staff. All staff members felt that the program had benefited not only the participating families, but the staff themselves. All had become more knowledgeable about the problems and barriers which these families faced daily and they grew more appreciative of those who participated in spite of those barriers. In addition, all had learned more about family literacy concepts and issues and felt more capable in conducting such programs in the future.
At the Brenham site, one staff member regularly contacted parents who were absent and would go to their homes to make certain they were planning to come next time.

The Community. Selected community members, including one school board member, were queried in regard to their knowledge and feelings about the PALS program. Although none professed to know very much about program specifics, all knew about the needs the

program was trying to fill for the families in the community. Illiteracy has received much publicity in Texas recently and it had not been missed by those who were interviewed.

The School District. Unfortunately, there isn't much evidence that the school districts valued the project to any great extent. This isn't unusual because the past has is filled with public education systems which have not recognized the value or importance of adult literacy.

Conclusions

1. Although some external factors did interfere with project operations, several strengths were evident. These included: (a) the willingness of the staff to periodically review program operations and make needed adjustments (adding GED classes); (b) the consistency of having the same staff throughout the program; (c) the constant emphasis upon "involving" the participants in a variety of learning activities, especially field trips; and (d) the individualization of instruction at the one site where the teacher was trained and had the experience to initiate this teaching method.

2. In general, this project should be deemed "successful", not only because the goals were mostly achieved, but because there is evidence that many families lives were positively affected. That, in essence, is what education is for, and if lives have been bettered because of participation in an educational activity, then that activity has been successful.

Recommendations

1. The period of time for funding family literacy projects should be changed from 18 months to 36 months. Not only would this provide ample "start-up" time to help ensure the success of projects, it is also in keeping with funding under the National Workforce Literacy Grants program. Beginning in 1994, projects under that program, previously funded for 18 months, now will be funded for 36 months. This change was initiated from recommendations by individuals who had previously administered projects under this program and who had suffered from insufficient "start-up" time.

2. If at all possible, furniture for parents' activities should be large enough for adults. At one site, the only furniture available was for children and the parents had to sit at low tables in very small chairs. It should be noted that in this project, the program staff had no control over this matter.

3. Future programs of this nature should plan for some kind of home visits to better document changes in parenting which may have occurred. Self reporting may be sufficient, but home visits could be more effective in documenting just how such changes are occurring in the home setting.

References

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